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THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT
LIBRARIANS

DEC.
1933

Volume 26 No. 11

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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION
OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS

(Section of the Library
Association)

Hon. Editor: Frank M. Gardner

Willesden Public Libraries



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EDITORIAL

O NCE again we have to announce a change of venue for the next meeting of the Association. The next meeting will be held on 13th December at Messrs. W. & G. Foyle's Bookshop, 119-125 Charing Cross Road, W.C.2. By kind invitation of Messrs. Foyle's, members will be shown over the premises, and are asked to meet in the main showrooms at 3 p.m. Tea will be provided at 4.30 p.m., and the business meeting will commence at 6 p.m. This will be the first of the series of discussions on "The Library and the community." Mr. J. Fry, F.L.A. (Barking), will open the discussion on "The Library and the aristocrat." The chair will be taken by Mr. Gurner P. Jones, M.A.

The joint meeting of the Association with the London and Home Counties Branch, held at the L.C.C. Hall on 8th November, was at once interesting and disappointing. From the point of view of a mere northerner, who had always imagined that meetings in London were large and vociferous assemblies ready to plunge into controversy on the slightest provocation, the attendance seemed small and the company far too placid. But the evening was not without its compensations. After a tour through endless marble halls, the magnificence of which would have impressed even the Emperor Augustus, we inspected the L.C.C. Library, which was chiefly notable for some delightful and bright blue-painted steel shelving. It seemed to come as a surprise to most people that steel shelving can combine both beauty and utility.

The papers which followed were all that could be wished for. Miss Fraser described a struggle against adversity in the L.C.C. Library which sounded horribly familiar to public librarians, and Mr. Duncan Gray extolled the virtues of co-operation in dulcet tones. His discourse contained a great deal of controversial matter, but, judging from the desert of silence which followed the call to discussion, everyone present agreed with him heart and soul. Unless most of the assistants present were overawed by the luxury of their surroundings, we have been sadly deceived about these London meetings.

The impressive ceremony which marked the opening of the New National Central Library at once set the seal on a great achievement and began a new era of library development. The occasions when libraries have been opened by Royalty are, one supposes, few, and the publicity accruing through this opening was valuable, not only to the National Central Library, but to the library movement in general. We of the younger generation are apt to disdain ceremonial, but those who were present on 7th November felt rightly that this was one occasion when

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ceremony was not superfluous. The congratulations of *The Library Assistant* are extended to Colonel Luxmore Newcomb for a remarkable and interesting feat of organization. With such a send-off, his library should indeed prosper.

On another page appears the address given by Mr. Stanley Unwin at the Inaugural Meeting. It has of necessity been slightly abridged, but our readers should find it none the less interesting and useful.

We must apologize to Miss Margaret Watt-Smith, and to the Sheffield Public Libraries, for an error which appeared in her article in our last issue. The circulation of books from the hospital library was given as 1,200. It should, of course, have been 12,000.

THE PUBLISHER, THE LIBRARIAN, AND THE READER¹

By STANLEY UNWIN

ABOUT fifteen years ago I was called upon rather unexpectedly to address a group of librarians. It was suggested that I should say something about the relationship between the publisher and the librarian. I replied that it could not be done, because there was no direct contact between the two. I added (unwisely) that I regretted the absence of contact, because I realized how much publishers, and particularly publishers attempting the kind of work that I was trying to do, could learn from librarians. I say unwisely, because there was a bookseller in the audience. As soon as the meeting was over he pounced upon me in a white heat of fury that I should seek to do him out of his job. He was, I am afraid, far too angry to be able to realize that my statement was true, even though I had no such intention as he attributed to me.

The whole question of contact, or rather absence of contact, between producer and consumer is of profound importance, and deserves more consideration than it receives. Think for one moment of the satisfaction we any of us feel in dealing with a craftsman who knows his job inside out and the hopeless feeling that comes over us when we have to explain to some shop assistant the defects of an article of the making or even the use of which the assistant is entirely ignorant. If the assistant were aware of his (or her) ignorance it would not be so painful. And at such times one is confirmed in the thought that it is not nearly so important to

¹ Address given at the Inaugural Meeting, London School of Economics, 22th October.

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teach people to know this or that as to teach them to realize how little they know. The better the craftsman the more eager he is to know anything and everything he can about his product, particularly from one who appreciates it and has experience of its use. In such a case contact between producer and consumer is beneficial to both. As something of a craftsman at my own job of publishing, I should much prefer to listen to-night to what you had to say rather than do the talking.

Most of you (as librarians) will be fortunate enough to be regarded as ordinary human beings. Not so the publisher. At one moment he finds himself looked upon as an unscrupulous rogue with positively Machiavellian cunning, and the next as a philanthropist with unlimited means behind him. The change from one rôle to the other is kaleidoscopic in its speed and variety. In odd moments between, a publisher finds himself regarded as a general enquiry office. At the end of a long day I have sometimes wondered what my occupation was, and have then recalled with a smile the omnibus conductor (described by Barry Pain) who found himself confronted by a succession of old ladies who, as he said, wanted an hour's quiet conversation and picked him out because he came handiest. He became so exasperated that when the umpteenth lady asked his advice about a kitten he replied : "I've been mistook for a string box, and a post office, and a lydeys' toilet company, and a foo other things already this morning, but blimey if I'm going to be mistook for a ospital for diseased cats !"

I must not stop to compare the differences between the publisher and the ordinary business man that arise during all the many stages between the arrival of the MS. and the completion of the finished article—the book. Salesmanship, we are often told, is much the same thing whatever the commodity you are selling. To a considerable extent that view may be true, but it is not wholly true. If you are manufacturing boots or bicycles, or any ordinary commodity, there is always a price at which you can sell them. Obviously you hope to sell them at a profit, but if you fail you can, if necessary, realize your stock at cost or within a small percentage of cost. With books this is the exception rather than the rule, and this fact by itself introduces an element of gambling into publishing of which there is no counterpart in most businesses. A 7s. 6d. novel which costs 2s. 6d., or even 2s. 8d., to produce will only fetch about 6d., or 8d. as a remainder, and many books cannot be sold at any price beyond their value for pulping, which is a negligible amount, owing to the expense of first pulling them to bits.

But I am afraid I am wandering from my theme.

For the purpose before us this evening, publishing may conveniently be divided into three classes :

1. Technical and educational.
2. General and literary.
3. Dope—giving the public what it wants.

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I do not propose to deal at any length with the first. The special problems that the technical and textbook publisher has to face are to a large extent prescribed. There is, in most cases, a definite target at which to aim. A lucky shot may secure an occasional winner, but other things being equal, the bull's eyes are scored by careful and scientific marksmanship.

In the general and literary field, however, we are faced with very different and much less definite problems. There is a sense in which we have ourselves to create the target at which we intend to aim. It may prove to be a real one or merely the non-existent product of our hopes and imagination.

No such difficulty faces the publisher in category 3. He says, "The public wants dope"—"Let there be dope," and lo ! there is dope in overwhelming quantity ! Far be it from me, however, to condemn the production of dope, so long as it is recognized as such, because unless I have forgotten Ecclesiastes, "to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." But I would emphasize that it is largely a mechanical process. And it would hardly be exaggerating to go farther and say that the actual writing and reading of such books are to a great extent mechanical processes.

There is much to be said for mass production, and many books that have stood the test of time lend themselves to mass production, but there is little to be said in favour of the standardization of men's minds, which is a more imminent danger than is apt to be realized.

In the lifetime of most of us here we have watched the complete transformation of the press. Vast technical improvements have been associated in many cases with a lowering of standards and an assumption of unbelievable ignorance in their readers.

What I may for brevity describe as Harmsworth methods are now being applied to book publishing. There is an increasing attempt to sensationalize all reading matter, and an endeavour to standardize our choice. The slogan "fewer and better books" means, as we can see in America to-day, a concentration upon books with a mass appeal and a reluctance to touch scholarly or unpopular work. How far this process will go depends upon ourselves. Gentlemen—you and the public at large will get the publishers you deserve ! Personally, I am moderately optimistic, but before giving the reasons for my optimism I should like to go back to our second category—the publisher of general, scholarly, and literary books. We have seen that his work is not prescribed, and that he has a more definitely creative function to perform. How well he fulfils it will depend upon the standard he sets himself. The day he says, "'Best-seller' be thou my God," deterioration will set in. Nevertheless, every general publisher needs an occasional "best-seller," not only to cover unexpected failures, but to leave him free to tackle what he knows from the outset will be

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commercially unprofitable ventures. No publisher can escape some proportion of "publishing failures," and no publisher of real standing fails to issue some proportion of books from which there is no hope of monetary profit. In olden days, as I have had occasion to mention in *The Truth about publishing*, nearly all the better firms of publishers considered themselves under an obligation to issue such books so far as their means justified them in so doing. It was often possible for them to do much in this way to foster learning, because if any of their more popular books were particularly successful the bulk of the profits came their way. To-day, with sliding-scale royalties, the author reaps the fruits of any exceptional success. This is quite as it should be, but it sets a very definite limit upon what even the most public-spirited publisher can do in the way of financing unprofitable undertakings. The "newest rich," to adopt a term which has been applied to the lucky and skilful modern writers whose incomes vastly exceed that of any book publisher past or present, show as yet no sign of any willingness to assume the obligations previously borne by many publishers out of the exceptional profits now enjoyed by some authors. Ought it not to be suggested to successful authors that they have a duty to perform? Have we not every reason to expect them to be at least as generous in their patronage of literature as the best publishers in the past? But it is perhaps more important to remember that we are all of us "patrons of letters." It is the shillings and pence of the individual members of the public and the expenditure of libraries that settle the fate of books, and oftentimes of their authors. Were that fact more fully recognized, what a revolution there would be in publishing! How many people realize, for instance, that the willingness or unwillingness of a few hundred people to buy a copy of a book may decide its fate?

How an author shall be paid, whether in fact he shall be paid at all, is, broadly speaking, decided by the public, not by the publisher. And the public is a very fickle paymaster. A monumental work of scholarship, universally recognized as such, may enjoy such a restricted sale as to yield no revenue to its author, whereas the potboiler of a successful novelist or playwright may bring in thousands of pounds. In authorship it is too often true that to him that hath shall be given and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. I often think what a different occupation publishing would be if the rewards of authorship bore some closer relationship to the value of the product, as it might easily do if people made a point of *buying* the books of authors whose work they felt deserved encouragement, and of refraining from running after the meretricious and second rate.

In this connexion I must emphasize how much depends upon librarians. Do you want book publishing to go the way of the newspaper press? If so, you can easily achieve it by following the example of the public librarian who

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boasts that he seldom buys a new copy of any serious book (he relies upon review copies), but admits that he is often compelled to buy new copies of admittedly ephemeral and second-rate stuff. On the other hand, you may take the view of a much more distinguished librarian who says he regards it as his duty to buy, and to buy as promptly as he can, any new book which is a definite contribution to learning or literature. Scholarly publishing would be far less difficult if there were more like him !

Turning again to the general public there is (alas !) at the back of most people's minds (librarians excepted) a curious inhibition when any question of buying a book arises. Ask any author his or her experience. They will all tell you the same thing, *viz.* that their friends, so far from buying copies of their books, expect to be presented with them. Were those same authors potters or painters, their friends would not expect to receive their products for nothing. Why then should they expect books ? Why should well-to-do people who would never dream of "begging" for anything else they wanted unblushingly "cadge" for books. And is it not a little disingenuous for people who can afford an expensive motor-car, unlimited cocktails, and costly dinner-parties to say they cannot "afford" a 3s. 6d. book ? I have come to the conclusion that what many people mean when they say they cannot afford books is that books, being the last thing in the world they contemplate buying, they never have any money left over for them.

For the sixpence a week expended upon an unnecessary evening paper or a superfluous packet of cigarettes a library of 50 volumes of Everyman could be built up in less than 4 years. If we gave one-tenth the thought to the nourishment of our minds that we give to the nourishment of our bodies England would be a very different place. Education would then be the last and not the first thing upon which we should want to economize.

I said a little earlier that I was moderately optimistic about the future of publishing. There are many reasons. One is that people are being compelled to think whether they want to do so or not. In pre-War days it was possible to drift along with a minimum of thought. To-day problems affecting every aspect of life vie with one another in stirring even the most sluggish mind. The thoughtful person must inevitably turn to books, because most of the papers with large circulations seem to assume that their readers never think, and moreover that their readers cannot even recall what was printed in the previous issue.

But my principal ground for optimism is the vast improvement in the teaching of English in our schools. I may be generalizing upon insufficient data, but the little I have seen has impressed me enormously. I have particularly in mind a secondary school with which I was for a while connected as governor. To the boys of that school English literature was a living thing, and they will go out into the world ready for the best we publishers can provide. Will they get it ? That

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is one of the problems that greatly concern some of us in the book trade. It is of little avail to bring children to the gateway of the garden of literature ; to give them during school years fleeting glimpses of the flowers within, and thereafter to leave them on the rubbish-heap outside. Fortunately, the public libraries are many of them fully alive to their opportunities and responsibilities in this matter, even if the book trade has been slow in moving. Many public libraries have admirable juvenile departments where the children receive every encouragement. But, like patriotism, book borrowing is not enough. It is easy to overdo the love of possessions, but books are amongst those intimate things to which all of us are, and ought to feel, entitled.

I have said that the problem of continuing and developing the love of good books inculcated during school years is receiving the attention of publishers and booksellers. It is essential that children should grow up as ready to enter a bookshop as a sweetshop. Surprising as it may sound to you, there are tens of thousands of adults to be found in England to-day who would be scared stiff to enter a bookshop—to take what is to them a step into the unknown. You would not find that same inhibition at work in Scotland, probably because in Scotland schoolchildren have regularly to visit a bookshop to get their schoolbooks, and a bookshop is thus a familiar place to them. It should be a friendly as well as a familiar place, and so it might be regarded if teachers and parents did their part. It would be difficult to give some children a greater treat than a visit to a bookshop like Bumpus, where there is a special department in which the children are made to feel at home and left free to browse.

At this point I should like to say how important I regard it to give children the maximum freedom with books. I speak with feeling, because as a child I suffered from an atmosphere in which stories were frowned upon. I even had the humiliation of having *David Copperfield* taken away from me when I was three-quarters the way through, and you will, I am sure, sympathize with me when I say that I did not find Max Müller's *Chips from a German workshop* in 4 vols. and Kingsley's *Miscellanies* in 2 vols.—excellent books though they were—an adequate substitute.

I do not feel a child can come to harm in any library of good books, and I mean good in the very broadest sense. The well of truth will not corrupt, but insincerity and propaganda may. There is enough hatred, malice, and uncharitableness in the world without going out of our way to inculcate it. The League of Nations is doing something to improve school textbooks, but there are in circulation to-day school story-books which are even more pernicious. I wonder how many librarians examine their war-time additions. My own son brought home from a library the other day a book by one of the most famous of living writers for boys, in which bayoneting babies and similar atrocities were described

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as if they were a special hobby of the Germans. When I drew the librarian's attention to the book, he thanked me, and at once destroyed it, but that and many similar books are still to be found in most libraries.

There is already in existence a new reading public to which Mr. Sidney Dark made such eloquent reference in his pamphlet under that name,¹ and the effect of whose purchases is influencing book production, but it is nothing to what there might be and will be when a generation grows up that from childhood onwards has learnt to regard books as amongst the best companions on life's journey. We should not then feel (as I for one now do) that the complaint I once heard an American make was applicable to us. He said, "There are 500,000 tobacco dealers in the U.S.A. and only 2,500 bookstores. . . . £3 15s. 8d. per annum is spent per head of population on sweets and ices, but only 4s. 7d. on books." The day we in England spend even one-half as much on books as we spend upon—let us say—cigarettes, education will assume an importance in the eyes of the people it has never yet had, and the immediate consequence of any such increase in the purchase of books would be a reduction in their price. With many commodities increased demand means an increase in prices, but with books this is definitely not the case. The reason is simple. The cost of setting up the type for a book remains the same whatever the number of copies printed. If the initial cost of composition amounts to, let us say, £150, i.e. 3,000 shillings, it will mean only 1s. per copy if it has to be spread over an edition of 3,000 copies, but to no less than 6s. per copy if 600 copies represent the maximum probable sale. And alas! the proportion of books that sell over 1,500 or even over 1,000 copies is much smaller than is generally realized.

It may interest you to know that the economics of book prices was investigated a year or two back by no less a person than J. M. Keynes, the famous economist, who has been so uniformly right in his diagnosis of our monetary troubles. He started his enquiry, as he frankly admits, with the impression that if all was not well with book distribution in England the publishers were to blame. But in his verdict acquitting the publishers, which you will find in a booklet entitled *Books and the public*, he wrote: "The fault lies, first and foremost, with the public—with their wrong psychology towards book-buying, their small expenditure, their mean and tricky ways where a book, the noblest of man's works, is concerned." Later, in the same interesting article, he adds: "From the purely business point of view, there is no case for reducing the price of the book, unless and until the potential book-buying public is very greatly increased . . . so long as the normal circulation of the typical good book, outside the narrow best-seller class, is not above 3,000 copies at the best, it is uneconomic, and indeed impossible, if author and publisher are to gain a living wage, to reduce the price of books."

¹ London : George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. (1s. net).

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Prices could in some cases be halved if the average sale of books could be trebled. But as matters stand at present, the halving of prices seldom if ever trebles sales.

It was the realization that it was in the interest of the public quite as much as of the book trade that there should be a larger sale of books that led some of us (despite much opposition at the outset) to found the National Book Council, of which I hope you are all members (you should be if you are not). Its objects are the promotion of book reading and the wider distribution of books. Its slogan, if it had one, might be: "Books are already cheap, but they will become cheaper still if you buy more." The emphasis of the N.B.C. is on books in general. Those of us publishers in category 2 who are concerned with the issue of the more scholarly and literary work believe, and I think believe rightly, that any general increase in book reading must in the long run lead to a desire for the best. You in this audience and others like you have it in your power to do more than you perhaps realize to assist in making the best available. Many readers of dope do not trouble to note the author's name, let alone that of the publisher. It is not important, but should not readers of books in my second category note the names of publishers as well as authors? Publishers and most booksellers and librarians know that certain imprints are a guarantee against rubbish, but how many readers are conscious of this? It would be a tremendous stimulus to good work were greater stress placed on the publisher's imprint and less upon advertisement and outward show, and such encouragement would be the more appreciated because it is astonishing how little official recognition is accorded to the book trade in Great Britain. There is, I believe, no civilized country in the world where it is such a Cinderella. Much is thought and written of the power of the daily paper, which is forgotten before the next issue is printed, but by comparison little is thought of the power of books which may endure for generations. The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker, may be found in lists of honours, but never a bookseller, and seldom a book publisher as such.

But let me turn to an aspect of my subject of more importance than any lack of recognition, and of greater interest to you all, *viz.* the publisher's duty to the public. It is most emphatically not to act as a censor, as some people seem to imagine. Censorship (except of the libellous and obscene) ill becomes a publisher; the more limited responsibility for seeing that the matter is reasonably well and clearly expressed is quite sufficient. In fact, I regard the publication of controversial books as a specially important part of a general publisher's function. What better way is there of securing deliberate and thorough investigation of new ideas and unpopular opinions? The enemy of subversive thought is not suppression, but publication: truth has no need to fear the light of day; fallacies wither under it. The unpopular views of to-day are the commonplaces of

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to-morrow, and in any case, the wise man wants to hear both sides of every question. Publication winnows the grain of truth from the chaff of prejudice and superstition, and it is the publisher's duty to help this process by maintaining an open forum.

Partly perhaps because of my interest in controversial literature, the lot of the general publisher with a varied range of interests seems to me the most enviable one, particularly if his list is dominated by the ideas of to-morrow rather than those of yesterday. His work brings him into close touch with the intellectual life of his time, affords wide scope for initiative, and gives endless opportunities to help the cause of progress.

It is thus the privilege as well as the duty of the general publisher to provide the best and most stimulating intellectual fare that he can, and in his sources of supply there should be no restrictions of nation, creed, or class.

My time is up, and I am conscious that I have only touched the fringe of my subject. There is much I should have liked to say, for instance, about publishing as a profession and the long and arduous training its mastery involves, but by this time you will have heard enough of publishers. If I have shown undue and possibly un-English enthusiasm for my job, I hope you will forgive me and be inclined to say with Ecclesiastes : "I perceive that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works ; for that is his portion."



VALUATIONS

By T. E. CALLANDER

IT seems hardly worth while writing an article at all this month. It will probably never be read. In fact, it seems very doubtful whether there is anybody to read it. Just as I discovered a year or so ago that there isn't any Santa Claus (it's your father), so I now discover that there aren't any public libraries (it's Lord Eustace Percy). We have been informed in a circular letter that hundreds of thousands of unemployed men and women will be without books this winter, and it seems that Lord Eustace is going to remedy the omission. He is appealing for books to be distributed to the unemployed. And librarians are being asked to help. We are a long-suffering lot, meekness is the badge of all our tribe, but even a bookworm will turn. There is something colossal in the impertinence of a man who can ignore a service which lends nearly a hundred and forty million books annually to all comers, and who can then turn to the organizers of that service and ask them to help a scheme born of his ignorance. I hope that all

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librarians will refuse to touch Lord Eustace Percy's foolish plan, and that there will be some corporate opinion expressed on a libel on the work of public librarians.

The Library Association is the obvious body to make such a protest, but it seems to have sponsored the distribution. Somebody ought to tell the Library Association about public libraries.

Annual Reports—Waterloo-with-Seaforth, Ilford, Lincoln, Folkestone, Leamington Spa, Barking, Wigan.

I certify that these libraries, during the year ended 31st March, 1933, have thoroughly, conscientiously, and assiduously carried out the provisions of the Public Libraries Acts. Their reports are witness to this. They also indicate, if not a lack of all imagination, at least a depressing uniformity. In every case issues are suitably astronomical, blind readers have been catered for, the N.C.L. has risen nobly to meet all demands, books have been added, bound in bright and attractive colours, and consigned to the outer darkness. But there has been no gusto. I cannot visualize the writer of any one of these reports cracking a bottle to celebrate its appearance.

There is something lacking in this sort of librarianship. I think it arises from that damnable belief that libraries and librarians must be neutral, emasculated, playing for safety all the time. This theory of respectable neutrality has done immense harm. It has had its effect on book selection, on publicity, on librarians themselves. For years we have been so desperately anxious to present the public library as an institution representing all views that we have succeeded in making of it an institution representing no view at all. We issue enormous numbers of books, but nobody seems to have any care as to what is the ultimate effect of all our work.

And what is the effect? Can any librarian say that, after fifty years of public libraries, there is any real spread of enlightenment? Is minority thought and action more tolerantly received now than fifty years ago? Are people less susceptible to the spellbinders who prey on herd emotions? If they are not, if the cultural level of the English people is not perceptibly raised each year, then public libraries are failing in their work. I maintain that they are failing, and must fail until librarians realize that their work is to lead public opinion and not to lag ten years behind it. Until librarians realize that the libraries they control are, with the B.B.C., the only strongholds of culture still untainted with commercialism, these too many annual reports will not be worth the paper on which they are printed.

Croydon sends an impressive document called *What Croydon reads*. The size of this report intimidated me, and I read it with care. Its statistics are impressive, and it is evident that Croydon reads a remarkable number of books. But the report gives very little information about the kind of books Croydon reads.

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True, there is a list of heavyweights showing the number of times each was issued. But the list tells me very little—it might appear in any report. I should like to know whether Croydon, after years of efficient librarianship, reads William Faulkner with gusto; whether there was a rush for Trotsky's *Russian revolution*; whether Croydon detected and rejected the mushy sentimentality of *Down the garden path*; whether the children prefer Westerman or Erich Kastner; whether they complain when they encounter books on Communism; whether Mr. Sayers dare put James Hanley on his shelves. Instead, I am told that *The Chess player's manual* was issued 19 times. That is what I call de-natured librarianship. As I have said, Croydon's statistics are impressive, some of them in more senses than one. We are told, for instance, that, during the year, 45,061 calls were made on the internal telephone system of the libraries. I am impressed here by the sublime faith of a man who can believe that his staff dutifully record every internal call that they make. And I am puzzled to find any possible use for such a record of calls. Perhaps, like so many other statistics, the record of telephone calls is made so that it can be put in the annual report.

Birmingham has increased the rate of its fines on overdue books from 1*d.* to 2*d.* weekly, with a resulting increased rapidity of circulation. I am glad to see this, for I have always maintained that a fine of 1*d.* a week is ridiculously ineffective. Twopence a week is not much better. At Finchley I have adopted a really punitive scale of 1*d.* a day, on the principle that, while every facility should be given to readers, and every leniency shown to those who are late through no fault of their own, the man who abuses the library service should pay heavily for his laziness or carelessness.

Bristol's report does not, in its contents, live up to its attractive format. Westminster contains a dignified and reasoned statement of the attitude of the Committee towards cheap fiction, and is further remarkable for being written throughout in prose of some distinction.

Publicity. Leeds sends a list called *For the housewife*. This is in almost every respect a model book list. It is short—only 4 pages in all. It is beautifully printed in Gill Sans type. It is the only list from a public library that I have ever seen which is set in one fount only. It is comprehensive and reasonably concise. I have only one complaint. The cookery section omits André Simon's *Book of food* and Welby's *The Dinner knell*. I know that these are not practical cookery books, but surely it would have been a graceful tribute to that art which waits on the purest of all pleasures to have included them. But perhaps Mr. Gordon is not such a greedy man as I.

This list is accompanied by another called *What shall I be?* A guide to careers, it is uniform with *For the housewife*, but is longer and very comprehensive. Both are admirable, and are achievements which are the direct antithesis in

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their spirit of that passionless librarianship which I have deplored. Somebody enjoyed compiling these lists, enjoyed bullying a printer into making them beautiful, and, I dare swear, somebody cracked a bottle when they were completed. Probably the bottle was shared by the designer of the *Leeds Programme of lectures, 1933-4*. These three pieces of publicity walk away with the honours for the month. I suggest that the Borough of Hammersmith might study the Leeds lecture list before producing another like the one before me now.

Dagenham, where even the millinery is impressive, does its book-lists handsomely. *Books for craftsmen* is a 50-page list with an index of books on engineering, mechanics, building trades, printing, and watchmaking. It is again a beautiful piece of printing, and its cover design is one of the best I have seen on a library publication. I cannot give any expert opinion on its book selection. The wireless section does not, however, look good to me. Gibson and Cole's *Wireless of to-day, 1924*, seems definitely out of place in a 1933 list. I know that it is almost impossible to keep up with progress in radio research, but there seems to be little justification for the inclusion in this list of six books which are more than five years old. Considered purely as publicity this is again a triumph for personal librarianship.



GENERAL OR SPECIAL RATING FOR THE EXTENSION OF LIBRARY FACILITIES IN LIMITED AREAS WITHIN A COUNTY?

By ETHEL F. WRAGG

OVER-EMPLOYED or completely unemployed is an apt description often applied to the Englishman of to-day with regard to his contributions to the world's work. One is inclined to believe that all County Librarians and their headquarter's staff fall into the first category, if every one of their multifarious duties receives even the scantiest attention. As one then whose chief duty is not to decide what is necessary to be done, but what is the most urgent need of the moment and what other duties may be put off, not until to-morrow, but until next year if possible, it is clear that the County Librarian would welcome payment from general rate of every atom of development, whether throughout the county or confined to a specified area. What a clean-cut-through and easy way out of the difficulty! How the work would dwindle, and what a number of tiresome explanations, interviews, and recapitulations would disappear overnight!

Theoretically, a flat rate levied throughout the county for all library purposes,

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whatever the differing services rendered to different localities within the county may be, is the ideal from the point of view of ease to the administrator. In fact, in the initial stages of the scheme the ease to the administrator may easily be enhanced by all prospects of a building for a populous locality being effectively outvoted by the representatives from sparsely populated areas for whom no building is projected at the same stage of development. A flat rate throughout a county giving the same or parallel adequate service in every district, whether rural or urban, industrial or agricultural, is the ideal and aim, one would imagine, of every county Library administrator.

In the meantime in the transitional, or rather development, stages there is another side to the question. This other side is in itself many-sided, and brings to bear upon it the whole weight of our insular growth in central and local government. Whether the County Librarian appreciates the fact or not, the county public library is a section of the county education department, subject as other sections to the jurisdiction of the chief education officer. Just as the county librarian expects a sympathetic understanding of his problems, which involves a knowledge of library matters by the education officer, is not that officer justified in expecting a reciprocal understanding of educational administration from the county librarian? Such a knowledge helps the librarian to understand and appreciate decisions, otherwise unintelligible, made in the light of past educational experiments. The greater library knowledge possessed by the librarian should help him to plead his cause successfully against such decisions which can in no way apply to libraries. The fact that special facilities in secondary education fought their way to established factors paid for from a flat rate throughout the county area, on years of special rating in specified areas, no doubt has had its influence in persuading education officers and their legal advisers that the best way of pushing the thin edge of the wedge into library development is by differential rating.

During the early years of this century one heard a great deal about palatial buildings erected in small urban areas for the sacred purposes of housing the local public library. The buildings became sacred. They swallowed up all the available income on fabric charges, and left nothing for the maintenance of the collection of books, which was the library proper. If these experiments in running libraries did nothing else, they cultivated a taste for local autonomy and something more important still. They showed the next generation of librarians that the books were the library, and only when a demand had been created for a suitable house for the collection of books already available would the erection of a building to be used specifically as a library be considered.

Local autonomy is the tradition and aim for every possible service, no matter how small the unit, of every unpaid worker, *i.e.* the councillor in English local government. The county has been made by law the authority for public library

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services. That service is not, however, a compulsory service with central government inspection requiring certain standards of attainment. In view of this, the county, with one eye on local autonomy and the other on efficiency and maximum service, allows the local area only receiving a skeleton service to be exempted from contributing to the expenses of the fuller service extended to another area. From past experience the county knows that many of the skeleton service areas will from sheer jealousy of privileges enjoyed by others ask for their activities to be extended and for the additional services to be paid for from a special rate. When all possible localities have been drawn into the network of differential rating and only the known backward obdurate areas are left, and in addition the administrative staffs are such that the completion of the development work can be undertaken, then the transition may be made. The dual payment of a skeleton service from general rate and a fuller service from differential rates in defined areas would be dropped in favour of a complete library service throughout the whole of the county met from a flat rate levied throughout the county.

ON THE EDITOR'S DESK

Have you good taste? By Margaret H. Bulley. Methuen. 3s. 6d.

THE problem of bad taste is one that inevitably confronts the modern librarian, who is concerned, not only with an improvement in taste in reading, but with an improvement in taste through reading. One may therefore welcome Miss Bulley as a colleague in the fight against super-cinemas, super-newspapers, and super-sex-novels, and this little book is one, not only to be recommended to readers, but also to be read by librarians.

Its chief interest to the general reader is a series of paired photographs of work in the minor arts illustrating worse and better taste. The photographs cover furniture, textiles, pottery, and metal-ware, and one has nothing but admiration for the subtlety of the selection. While some of the pieces illustrated are vile, others only lose by comparison with better work of the same nature. The standards set are absolute, in that they have no reference to period or craftsman. The person who thinks that a thing must be beautiful because it is old will fall into the same trap as the person who thinks that the minor arts only began with Duncan Grant and Djo Bourgeois. One can see these photographs being used this Christmas as an interesting, though dangerous, party game for highbrows.

So far, of course, the book is of only indirect interest to librarians. But its appendix, which consists of a statistical summary of the results of a test on the photographs conducted in the *Listener*, has several details of direct interest. One is

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that definite training in taste is necessary, since university-trained people make a very much better average of correct choices than people with a secondary school education, and the difference between secondary-school education and primary education is even more marked. Primary education gives little more than 50 per cent. of correct choices, which is little better than guesswork. One would like to see these results published in a fuller form, or even better, made the basis of a really searching examination of taste. It would be interesting, for example, to see taste in one direction related to taste in other directions. Or one might take the matter further, and investigate how the man of feeling would be likely to look on social and economic questions. Could an admirer of Goya be an ardent militarist, for example? Could the reader of William Faulkner be a believer in capitalism? Here is an interesting field of enquiry for the statistically minded young librarian.

Statistics of urban public libraries in England and Wales (1931-2). H.M.S.O. 9d. net.

We will begin this notice with a complaint. The last figures available for urban libraries were for 1923-4, and they were collected more or less incidentally for the report of the Committee on Public Libraries. The interval between has been too long, and if the Library Association cannot persuade the Board of Education to give us anything better than decennial statistics, then it should consider the possibility of issuing them itself.

However long delayed, these statistics make pleasant reading. Pleasanter reading, perhaps, because they are delayed, and progress is thus made more apparent. Progress there is, in abundance. The total number of books issued in 1932-3 was 136,231,833. The number of registered readers was 4,320,731. This represents almost a doubling of the 1923 figures, and however much these figures are caused by depression and unemployment, they are none the less impressive. Beside the enormous increase in issues, it is very interesting to see that expenditure has increased only from 1s. to 1s. 4d. per *caput*, so that public libraries cannot be accused of undue extravagance. It seems, on the basis of this small increase of expenditure, that we should be able to provide a book service for the whole of the community at a price which would compare very favourably with the subscription to the cheapest and nastiest "tuppenny library."

Issues per head of population in the chief county boroughs have increased from 3·5 to 5·8. The greatest increase is at Sheffield, from 2·7 to 7·3, but Cardiff leads the field with the remarkable figure of 11·5. On browsing through the figures for the whole of the country, however, we find that the banner must be given to Buxton, which issues over 12 books per head of population, and records for its percentage of borrowers the really extraordinary figure of 56·8! The stimulating effect of the Buxton waters must be greater than one had imagined.

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Figures, as one of our contemporaries would no doubt observe, have very little significance in themselves. Quality, as well as quantity, is what we want. No doubt a large proportion of the enormous issue increase consists of rubbish. But one feels that 136,000,000 books cannot be all wrong, and if in the next ten years a similar progress is made, as one hopes, then we librarians will be in a fair way to becoming important people. Very soon now a start must be made in pushing that solid pile of books in a definite direction.

F. M. G.

COUNCIL NOTES

THE result of the election for a non-London councillor is as follows:
G. P. Jackson, 211; W. G. Fry, 128; L. A. Burgess, 78; A. J. R. Blackman, 29.

Mr. G. P. Jackson is therefore elected.

NEW MEMBERS

JOSEPH A. CHESTER (Croydon); Cyril W. Cleverdon, Sybil M. Cocking, Ethel Mildon (Bristol); A. C. Mann (Research Dept., Callender's Cable Co., 38 Wood Lane, W.12); Margaret Martin (Torquay); Winifred M. Snelling (Leyton); Ida D. Taylor (Camberwell); C. Thompson (Southwark).

Midland Division.—B. E. Adams (Leicester County); Margaret S. Ackworth (Warwick County); H. C. Benton, Florence J. Cox, Helen S. Waterson (Birmingham); N. Boodson (Birmingham University); B. P. Hancocks, Stella M. Hines (Coventry); A. J. Parsons (Leicester).

North-western Division.—Philip Dunderdale, W. W. Yeates (Preston); Mary Haworth (Accrington); Miss D. Errington (Chester); Beatrice Jones (Newton-in-Makerfield).

Yorkshire Division.—Miss M. S. Bingham, Miss F. I. Caine (Sheffield); Miss M. Walsh (Leeds).

Correction.—N. S. E. Pugsley (Westminster, *not* Bristol).

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THE DIVISIONS

MIDLAND DIVISION

THE Annual Meeting was held in the Birmingham Reference Library on 27th September, 1933. Several interesting points emerged from the Annual Report for 1932-3 (published in the current number of the Divisional magazine—*Open Access*.) An increase of 60 members brings the total up to 316. No Transitional Members now remain, a fact of which the Division is not a little proud, since the percentage of full members for the whole of the Section is only 79 per cent. The scheme for joint meetings with the Birmingham and District Branch has been conspicuously successful, both as regards magnitude of meeting and press publicity gained thereby. Notable successes were the joint meetings with the Yorkshire Division at Sheffield and with the Welsh Branch at Shrewsbury.

Other points were: the Division provided 6 Tutors for the A.A.L. Panel, and 110 members gained L.A. certificates during the year; the average sale of *Open Access* rose to over 200 copies per quarterly issue; two social evenings were well attended and thoroughly enjoyed.

After the formal business about 70 members adjourned to a neighbouring café for the third Joint Social Evening, giving themselves up to dancing and other frivolities with an abandon that might perhaps have surprised some of the more dignified "pillars" of the profession.

J. H. D.

SOUTH WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE DIVISION

There is one great difficulty in writing these Divisional notes. Unless a meeting is held during the first week of the month, it cannot be reported in *The Assistant* until the next issue but one, by which time it is usually dry—figuratively, not literally—history, and in announcing the arrangements of Divisional meetings, the Secretary of the Division, like the Editor of *Home Chits*, must think of the New Year before Christmas. I make no apology therefore in writing about the October meeting of the Division. The visit to Cardiff Castle in the afternoon was entertaining if not instructive, and it was particularly noticeable that during the inspection of the library the ladies took more notice of a bound volume of cuttings, etc., of the wedding of the noble Marquis's son than of the actual contents of the library. After tea at the Cardiff Central Library, Mr. John Warner, Chief Librarian of Newport, read a paper on "Book-binding leathers." I for one was amazed that such a lot could be said about such a neglected subject, and besides giving many useful hints to examiners, Mr. Warner appeared to impart much information even to fully qualified members. The last few hours of a most enjoyable evening were spent in dancing to the music of a radio-gramophone.

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The Annual General Meeting and Social will be held at Cardiff on Wednesday, 20th December, details of which will be circulated to members in due course.

E. S.

SOUTH-WESTERN DIVISION

A successful meeting, held at Winchester, on Wednesday, 6th September, opened with an extremely interesting and instructive talk in the Cathedral Library by Canon Goodman, who described the history and contents of the collection. An informal walk round the cathedral and other places of interest followed, and later tea was taken at the invitation of the City Librarian (Mr. F. W. C. Pepper, F.L.A.). In the evening a meeting was held in the School of Art, when the Chairman (Mr. T. C. Boulter, of Bournemouth) gave an account of a cycling tour in the Lake District. This proved particularly interesting, as the combination of scenic descriptions, literary associations, and poetic quotations was admirably chosen by the speaker.

The second ramble was held in the New Forest on Sunday, 1st October, and proved very successful. The enthusiasm shown is indicated by the fact that members from Portsmouth, Bournemouth, and Poole were present.

CORRESPONDENCE

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT,
DEAR SIR,—

In reply to Mr. Pottinger's article, "Co-operation in fact," it is quite obvious to this gentleman that as Secretary and Treasurer to the Northern Regional Scheme there is, and can be, nothing like leather, and that the library millennium in co-operation has been reached up north. I am not acquainted with the detailed working of this particular scheme, but what I stated in my article are actual facts, for which I can supply documentary evidence. I will also take a lot of convincing that the readers in the north are quite different from those in other areas, in their application to these Regional Bureaux for new books and textbooks.

In regard to the spread of these regional libraries, how is it that two of the largest and most densely populated counties, namely Yorkshire and Lancashire, are without them? These counties contain many of the largest and best-equipped libraries in the country. One would imagine that, having read of the work of the Northern Regional Scheme, these larger libraries would rush to inaugurate such schemes. But they have not; and the men in charge of these libraries are experienced and trained men, with (and I say it with all due defer-

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ence) perhaps a little more knowledge of public library work than Mr. Pottinger. Perhaps it has dawned upon these librarians that these schemes cannot be self-supporting, however ingeniously you juggle with figures of income and expenditure, and that they are going to be an ever-growing costly job, the bigger library being the milch-cow for the area.

I am not entering into an academic discussion as to the meaning of the word co-operation. If Mr. Pottinger will put a pound into any co-operative scheme and ask to draw 20 pounds out, he will soon be told what co-operation is. In regard to the "independent" review by Mr. J. H. Pafford, of the N.C.L. (a co-operative colleague), of the report of the Northern Regional Scheme, I can only again state what any fair-minded person can deduce from this review, namely, the plain fact that 80 per cent. to 90 per cent. of the applications received are for modern books. It may interest Mr. Pottinger to know that quite recently, with my usual bad taste, I examined twenty regional applications (*not* of course from the Northern scheme). Ten were for textbooks in use at the local Universities and Technical Colleges, five were for recently published books, one was for the *Stock Exchange Yearbook 1933*, and two were for the current number of periodicals.

In these schemes co-operation is becoming an insidious form of subsidizing. What is happening is that libraries are relying too much on this one-sided co-operation. The systematic building up of a stock and scientific book selection are being dropped. The smaller libraries pay their £5, £10, or £30 to the Regional Bureau, and expect everything in return, and are not buying the books they should do for their stock. I maintain that a library with an income of £2,000 to £3,000 has no right to pay £30 to the upkeep of a local regional scheme. It would be far better if that library devoted its £30 (plus the cost of posting books) to building up its own stock.

If these schemes were confined to the circulation of scarce and out-of-print books for genuine research students and scholars, they would be performing their proper function. The charge to the smaller libraries would then be merely nominal, merely the postal charges. But then, these costly Regional Bureaux, on the lines they are now run, would be unwanted.

I can assure Mr. Pottinger that there is no one more keen on *real* co-operation than myself. In my humble experience of thirty years' public library work, I have found a very fine spirit of co-operation among librarians, especially those of the larger libraries such as Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford, and Hull, who have always been ready to lend a scarce or out-of-print book, but I cannot imagine these libraries allowing themselves to become the milch-cow for an insidious and dangerous form of subsidizing misnamed co-operation.

Yours faithfully,

C. SEXTON.

The Library Assistant

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

Mr. Gordon has been good enough to send me a copy of *What to read on geography*, in the series of pamphlets issued by the Leeds Libraries. This indispensable pamphlet, indispensable because it is both conspectus and bibliography, should have been included in the bibliographical guides noted in my article on "Geographical literature in the public library," in the November *Assistant*. I take this opportunity of drawing the attention of readers to it.

Yours faithfully,

W. A. MUNFORD.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

8th November, 1933.

DEAR SIR,—

It would appear, from the article by Mr. Pottinger in the last issue, that under his dictatorship the Northern Regional Library is the alpha and omega of co-operation.

Since becoming an "outlier" of the National Central Library, the Dagenham Libraries (a scheme of less than four years' existence) has lent to the clients of the N.C.L. 15 works, of which two, on Mr. Pottinger's methods, would have been refused. Both of these were lent to people in the Northern Regional area. One, a book in demand but purchased at a small cost, the other, a work in two volumes, always in circulation,—Marshall & Hobbs's *Wonderful Models*. This work is in print and can be obtained at 12s. 6d. a volume. Surely it is time one library in the Northern Regional area purchased a copy. Nevertheless, we did not refuse the request. Bearing in mind the fact that we have borrowed from the N.C.L. this year 72 volumes (two only were sent from "outliers"), we look on it as our duty to lend whenever possible. Incidentally, Mr. Pottinger's client (for such I assume he is) thought we should pay postage in addition! Evidently the area is the wrong side of the Border!

Mr. Pottinger cannot hope to show us how a Regional Scheme should function by merely casting doubt on Mr. Sexton's facts. Mr. Pottinger refuses to believe Mr. Sexton's statements, but requires complete faith for his own. We must have constructive criticism, for that is what Mr. Sexton presumably wants.

Finally, to view the relationship of the parish postman with the Postmaster-General as co-operation instead of organisation is ludicrous.

Yours faithfully,

W. C. PUGSLEY.

The Library Assistant

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

Miss Carnell's letter, in so far as it deals with the legal authority for the levying of a general rate, is self-explanatory, as she has reasoned out the answer and found it, in that the first part of Section 4, subsection 2, does relate to the general rate. The latter part was not taken out of its context, because obviously it is not complete by itself. The article was written with examination candidates in mind, and in answer to questions that have been put to me from time to time by those candidates. Frankly, it never occurred to me to mention the authority for the levying of a general rate. I took it for granted.

That Miss Carnell finds it difficult to believe that an Act of Parliament could not spare even separate sentences for the authorization of two methods of finance is beyond my comprehension. Personally, I have never found Acts of Parliament praiseworthy for their meticulousness or lucidity, and I have always found the necessity for members of the legal profession to give correct rulings on different interpretations of "Acts" to be a very real one.

The final query raised by Miss Carnell as to the advisability of special rates is dealt with in an article printed elsewhere in this number.

Yours faithfully,
ETHEL L. WRAGG.

EXHIBITION

THE *Sunday Times* Book Exhibition, held at Sunderland House from 6th-20th November, compensated all librarians who were able to spare the time to visit it. Its chief interest was, of course, the large collection of modern manuscripts, and the exhibition of work of modern publishers, though the room devoted to first editions was very attractive to visitors of an antiquarian turn of mind.

This is not the place to describe the handwriting and manner of working of modern authors, however interesting these may be to each of us individually. But it was something of a revelation to learn that, out of the sixty-four authors represented in the exhibition of manuscripts, only one or two showed really untidy work, and very few of the MSS. were hard to read. The most noteworthy was perhaps that of Bernard Shaw. His hand is very neat and clear. I wondered, in passing, how many sheets of Miss Rose Macaulay's small loose-leaf went to make up a complete book, for she had only a few words on each.

Having regard to the correspondence now appearing in a certain famous newspaper concerning the demise or otherwise of the Victorians, it was very

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interesting to note the "Hundred years of best-sellers" exhibit. Of the forty-three books here shown, only one was totally unknown to me, either by title or author, and, with only one or two exceptions, all of them are in our libraries and being regularly issued. The earliest given here was *Uncle Tom's cabin*, 1852, and the latest *The Good companions*, 1929. The one unknown was Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly twins*, and according to Dr. Baker's "Guide" I have suffered little by this ignorance.

The thirty-four examples shown of English bookbinding, from a twelfth-century St. Augustine bound MS. to two fine examples of the work of Miss Sybil Pye in 1929 and 1930, should have interested all good librarians. With regard to this art in England, I cannot do better than quote Mr. Flower's foreword to the catalogue. As he says, public interest in bookbinding is practically negligible. "There are collectors who will pay a large price for a piece of indifferent printing because it is numbered, 'limited,' and issued from some apocryphal press, but would not lay out half the sum for a book bound by one of the fine craftsmen at work in this country to-day. There is no good reason for this deplorable state of affairs; good bindings are within the reach of many more book lovers than actually buy them." I have sometimes wondered if some of our larger reference libraries could not do something in this respect. What a vision so many of them present with their sombre quarter-Nigers and half-pigs. Our Committees, I suppose, would have something to say!

W. H. C. MORETON.

Now there but remains for me to give my inadequate impressions of the publishers' stands. And what "impressed" me most was the display of dust-jackets. Some stands looked as much like some "ultra-modern" art-show as an exhibition of books. The one notable exception to these colour-effects was the stand of Messrs. Macmillan, where the assistant told me he had purposely removed many of his book-jackets to display the bindings. No other of the forty odd firms had apparently any bindings worth showing, save a few individual books in special luxury editions.

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY HARRILL, WATSON AND VINET, LTD., LONDON AND AYLESBURY.

